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ABSTRACT

Libraries have a special obligation to provide educational opportunity to all segments of the population, especially the disadvantaged and minority groups. Libraries have made some progress in this mission, but it is important to organize to continue work. Libraries should seek systematic participation of schools in joint programs, encourage the use and development of multiethnic books and work to be more responsive to the needs of ethnic groups in their communities. Libraries are in a unique position to work for and bring about desirable social change. (KB)

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WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Speech by Dr. Hardy R. Franklin

American Library Association Conference, July 1976

The topic assigned me, "Where Are We Going?" leaves me a wide open area from which to speak and a lot of ground to cover. I might begin by saying that the four ALA Workshops and two institutes at Queens College have done much to bring to the front the problems of providing for the needs of minorities. I hope that interest will continue and that the momentum begun by EMIE can also continue through an organized committee.

We all agree that important work has been done, but a way must be found to continue it. The list of ethnic publishers has been invaluable. Even more worthwhile would be continuously up-dated bibliographies in the various fields, a regular newsletter of matters of current happenings, guidelines for the acquisition of foreign language materials, and the directory of ethnic studies, librarians and ethnic resource organizations! Other ALA groups--expanded into Committees--have done all this with nothing more than interested members willing to volunteer time for the projects. I regret that grant funds were not available to start the Information Center and I know that Dave is not giving up on that. Until this comes to pass, can't we organize to continue our work?

Many caucuses of various ethnic groups have come into being within the last few years. I feel that these ethnic and special interest groups,

with the enormous interest of their membership, should come together in some way so that they can participate in our projects. Additionally, it should be pointed out that we should be making the entire profession aware of our findings and concerns since these services should be the responsibility of all professionals in the library world, not only our group. Further than this, we need to enlist cooperation outside our own walls. All of these efforts are tied in with education. One of our first priorities might be to seek systematically the participation of schools, at all levels to encourage joint programs.

Among other ideas for the future that I would like to lay before you today is one advanced by Nancy Larrick last year. If we do continue, and while we are busy with the various aspects of the work already outlined, let us consider ways of reaching librarians and educators to emphasize the need to use multi-social books with all children as a means of fostering greater understanding among all segments of the population. Just because a child lives in a predominately white suburb is no reason for his library to decide there is no need to buy books on Blacks. That white child needs them all the more since this will probably be his only source of information. Society is no longer compartmentalized but there is still a long way to go in educating all of us in the possibly strange customs and habits of others.

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If libraries have a true role in the fundamental life of mankind, they must recognize their mission to educate all and sundry to better understanding.

Another point made by Nancy Larrick is the need for more readable, high quality books about Blacks. Education of publishers goes hand in hand with education of those who use their output.

And now a word about collection development in general. All libraries subscribe to the theory of a viable collection of materials, built around a core of basic materials, but with much of the collection tailored to specific communities. Many do this; too often, however, the basic collection forms the bulk of the materials with not enough special items for the community's special needs. I say let us have those classics and basics, without which we cannot call ourselves a library, but let us put forth a concerted effort to make librarians aware of the needs of ethnic groups, and the special materials available for them. If we do not, all our work will be in vain. Historically, we know that library users are attracted by what they find that is familiar. That is as it should be and this is where the special ethnic materials come in. The second step is librarians leading them from the familiar, to the more unfamiliar, and finally, to use of that basic quality collection so dear to us all. This brings us full circle through the materials and leads us to building quality books and quality minds.

Library schools have recently become more aware of the need for courses in service to minorities and collection development for these groups. This trend should be substantially expanded so that the quality of our service will improve. There can be no substitute for well-trained, committed staff; the burden for this must fall on our library schools.

I believe that it has not been brought out anywhere in our deliberations the importance of integrating any increased collection development, expansion of services, or creation of new units into the organization's established structure and consistent with its overall goals and objectives. Meaningful service can only be achieved in this way; this must not be tacked on to an existing program as an afterthought if service to ethnic groups is to be effective.

Now--how to get under way? The D.C. Public Library's Black Studies Division, brought into being four years ago, is a thriving concern now. From its inception through the use of Library Services and Construction Act funds, it was developed as an integral part of the service. Lack of funds is the universal cry these days. Yet, setting goals and objectives, and careful examination of priorities and staffing patterns, may still yield a staff member and a few dollars to give increased service to ethnic groups as needed. LSCA gave focus to service to the disadvantaged Blacks, Spanish speaking, Asians, etc. A few years ago no one could predict that we would need to

buy materials to serve large numbers of Vietnamese. We must remain flexible and willing to respond to these many and varied groups. I hope we shall never fail them.

Before I conclude, I would like to say a word about service in general in disadvantaged areas. Earlier this week I talked to a group on this very topic; and because it is of equal importance in considering service to ethnic groups, many of whom live in disadvantaged neighborhoods, I shall risk repeating some of those ideas and hope that none of you heard them earlier.

I feel strongly that the public library, as an agency embodying the all important "mandate for learning" of our times, must commit itself to the promotion of social progress and a better standard of life for the people, especially the poor. Education is obviously the most basic prerequisite for the realization of such goals and for achieving the overall aim of desirable social change.

Public libraries have often been called "the universities of the people." These words have an especially relevant meaning and express an acute and poignant need, because knowledge has always been recognized as a form of social power.

The public libraries must not overlook, or neglect, the continuing obligation to those who already come, and those who can be encouraged to come, to the libraries seeking service. On the other hand, the libraries

must also attract and try to serve a far greater proportion of the population than has been reached so far in any community, enabling this group to use library materials to an extent not yet attempted anywhere.

The nonreader and the nonuser are frequently found in the ghettos and, as such, have not really been counted, considered, or planned for in the blueprint for flexible quality library service in the past. But public libraries can no longer afford to have a policy of business as usual plus a fringe of outreach service to the disadvantaged or poor minority groups.

The public library is one of the few institutions in the community that provide an opportunity for continuing education. As such, it should experiment with, and provide, programs that would be of value in this area. As an educational institution, the library has an obligation to keep the door of opportunity open, not shut it. While many do not respond to our programs we must be sure that all at least have the opportunity to respond. We cannot disregard our basic goal of providing service to all--equality, but not uniformity, of service. This means, somehow, making the library useful to those it presently does not serve and convincing these nonusers that we have something worthwhile to offer them.

How can this be done? In the first place, the library should be

ready to respond to the values and aspirations of the community it hopes to serve. It should provide concrete programs and services based on community needs. This means, in some cases, modifying traditional patterns of service; in other cases, it means developing and using completely new methods if service is to be effective. Most importantly, it means remaining flexible and open to all possibilities. For example, low circulation of books for home reading does not mean that the disadvantaged cannot utilize printed information or do not need access to it. Low income, and even low educational level, does not preclude reading. However, the material must be related to real life situations and needs within the experience of the individuals served, and must be written at an appropriate reading level. Format and organization of the material are also important if people with limited reading ability are to be attracted to the library. Newspapers, pamphlets, magazines and paperback books are usually to be preferred to hardbound books. Subject areas to which disadvantaged adults relate strongly are employment skills and opportunities, consumer education, health, self-improvement, legal rights, family life, Black heritage, and awareness.

The objectives of the public library should be social objectives, and the library should be firmly committed--through its pursuit of such

objectives--to desirable social change. The library is by definition outside party politics, but this does not mean that it should not be committed to, and should not actively advocate, the achievement of social goals that would end the evil heritage of poverty, of socio-economic and cultural deprivation of disease, unemployment and underemployment, crime, drug abuse and so on.

By providing very special attention to the needs and interests of the disadvantaged, by inviting a participatory role of the community and by otherwise developing two-way community contact and community relations, by providing cultural enrichment for all on a truly democratic basis, and by other means along the same line, the library should work for, and help bring about, the desirable social change.